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ABSTRACT

Research on comparative and international education cannot rely solely on the work of scholars. Before conclusions are reached, researchers may benefit from an examination of what journalists working in various countries have learned. While journalists may give less emphasis to education than to political, economic, social, or personality factors, many have written about educational activities in national, regional, and local contexts. A number of scholars have written and reported on their understandings of Soviet schools. In most cases, these scholars obtained their information from official reports, government personnel, or reviews of the writings of other researchers. These scholars are often handicapped by lack of time, their inability to insert themselves into the system, and a propensity to review only official documents. Journalists are rarely mentioned in scholarly works about comparative education and are not asked by scholars to share their knowledge. Because some journalists have resided in the Soviet Union for many years, they have been able to develop a realistic and accurate understanding of the Soviet educational system. They can observe, listen, compare, and analyze material over time, which results in useful insights and clarity that can be added to data. Educational comparatists and journalists should share their knowledge and view themselves as colleagues. (JHP)

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NEW APPROACHES TO RESEARCH IN COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION THE USSR AS PARADIGM

by

Nathan Kravetz

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NEW APPROACHES TO RESEARCH
IN COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION
THE USSR AS PARADIGM

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1830's, Alexis de Tocqueville reported his views and observations of the young United States of America. He had spent nearly a year traveling the land, talking to people of all classes, and writing careful notes on what he had heard and seen.

In the final chapter of American Institutions, he summarizes his positive conclusions and describes the future of the Union:

"The time will therefore come, when one hundred and fifty millions of men will be living in North America, equal in condition, all belonging to one family, owing their origin to the same cause, and preserving the same civilization, the same language, the same religion, the same habits, the same manners, and imbued with the same opinions, propagated under the same forms. The rest is uncertain, but this is certain; and it is a fact new to the world,--a fact which the imagination strives in vain to grasp." [1]

De Tocqueville has seen the future and it is good. While he notes various aspects less favorably than others in his report, he is impressed with what he has seen and he compares it with other nations he also knows.

He is not a powerful enough prophet to encompass in his view the results of the multiple immigrations which will make his "Anglo-American" nation something else indeed, and his "sames" will come into play within the confines of such new varieties of Americans.

Yet he is a good enough prophet in spite of himself, since so many of his "sames" will indeed come true, thanks to the burgeoning press which he observed and, eventually, to the powers of the pervasive electronic media which he could not foresee.

To his summary about the Union's future, he appends a contrast between Russia and America, comparing them:

"...The Anglo-American (sic) relies upon personal interest to accomplish his ends, and gives free scope to the unguided strength and common sense of the people; the Russian centers all the authority of society in a single arm. The principal instrument of the former is freedom; of the latter, servitude. Their starting-point is different, and their courses are not the same; yet each of them seems marked out by the will of Heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe." [2]

We may note with some grim satisfaction how good a prophet de Tocqueville has turned out to be.

In 1919, famed journalist, acclaimed muckraker, and notorious busybody, Lincoln Steffens went to revolutionary Russia in February, returning in March. Traveling with future United

States Ambassador William C. Bullitt who was on a mission for President Wilson, Steffens was able to interview Lenin, to meet with numerous Bolshevik Russians, and to reach his prompt conclusions.

Bernard Baruch commented to Steffens later in Paris, "So you've been over into Russia."

Steffens replied, "I have been over into the future, and it works."

Later, Bullitt wrote that it was while they were on the train to Stockholm, long before they reached Russia and met any Bolsheviks, that Steffens had begun to rehearse those words. They would sing in Western ears for the next two decades.[3]

ACADEMICS AT WORK

It has been long considered appropriate and necessary for knowledge and understanding to be continually sought by those who presume to "profess" in education. Those who are in the know are better prepared to teach than those who are not so enlightened. For many, in educational enterprises and out of them, the awareness of, and attention to, what is happening out there beyond our own domain are requisites for both research and teaching.

Research, as is well known, is the art and the science of asking appropriate questions, of seeking the answers--or at least the means for discovering them--and, eventually, to present the answers so that those who have done the research are now possessed of answers in some form.

The answers most frequently sought by scholars in comparative and international studies in education belong to such categories as:

what is going on in the schools "over there"; what has gone on; why is the present situation what it is; how did it get that way; which way is it likely to go and why.

In many cases, researchers seek to learn how two or more educational enterprises--national, regional, or other--compare in terms of specified criteria. When such comparisons are undertaken, scholars often try to make sure that, at the outset, equals are in fact compared, or if they are not equal in important details, that justified allowance is made for differences.

Basic to all inquiry is the recurring search for reasons why certain educational conditions prevail. What made such circumstances come about? What actors (or factors) were most responsible? Are there specific elements that should be examined closely and seen in their most relevant context? What should or can be placed under the powerful spotlight of objective reason and then analyzed?

Under some conditions of research, conclusions are reached about these questions which sum up what is now known as a result of the scholarly efforts that have just been expended. Conclusions may be so definitive that there is no good, evident reason for further study in the matter. The answers turn out to be clear, and they may be applied or "generalized" to other, similar sets of circumstances. They are then said to embrace colleagues and fellow scholars in "theory" which has now been established as a paradigm that others may accept and follow.

While the foregoing is somewhat discursive and reflective rather than laden with punctilious referrals, it bears the burden of

general verity without detailing all the possible complexities of data and how they may be examined and compared. Researchers do their studies, write their reports, and see to it that their conclusions are manifest and clear.

Often, though not necessarily as a matter of course, the scholar ventures to go beyond the "conclusions" and takes the seemingly consistent step of providing "recommendations". With this pair of packages, interested parties in the nation (or region, or ethnic group, or other object) under study, may examine what has been wrought and may take for closer consideration, the author's proposals for change. Such suggestions as have been offered may indeed provide the best path to improvement of ways and means or to bringing unsatisfactory conditions into healthier ones.

On the other hand, one scholar's sets of conclusions and recommendations may be at variance with those of another. When this happens, it is altogether reasonable to ask where did Professor A get his information, as opposed to the sources and ingenuity of Professor B. Theoretically, and actually, they may have indeed been the same for both.

Researchers A and B both sought out the organizers and guardians of educational activity of the several countries under study: ministry officials, regional officers, legislative participants (in democratic countries), executives, and other personages in charge of the system of instruction and of the archives which contain interesting data.

Data in the files of international collecting agencies such as UNESCO, World Bank, OECD, OAS, are also found, tabulated,

manipulated, and presented as the sources of eventual scholarly studies. In fact, such data are exchanged, shared, provided, and published as the best available information to be found regarding the countries or regions under study.

It is, of course, impossible to verify the data by entering physically into the archives and bureaucracies of a nation and participating in the collection and interpretation of the information received and stored. In most countries, particularly those on whom the designation of Third World has been bestowed, the distance from the capital may be in direct relation to the accuracy of data provided about schools, students, teachers, attendence, and achievement.

There is, also, no way to determine the nature and amount of "doctoring" which is administered to information when it reaches central authority. Nor does a ranking officer in a ministry of education hesitate to declare that some data are of uncertain validity, thus delaying or withholding them from the possibility of study.

Yet, the researcher, basing his work on nationally provided information, or on data from international agencies, does the best he can. He proceeds, eventually, to statistical materials, to abstruse semantic exercises relating education to industrial production or to ethno-cultural impacts, or to the persistence of student enrollment, or to any other connections which facility in the use of language may allow.

It must be evident that researchers live not from studies of paper alone. The assiduous scholar will make the effort to

literally be in the environment which he wants to study and whose problems he is going to analyze, with the help of visits to the schools (where surely he speaks the language), conferences with students, teachers, school officers, parents, and significant others.

In such situations, the data made available by official sources may be complemented (if not contradicted) by in situ experience. Some teachers will speak freely; so will students, parents, and others who are sufficiently knowledgeable of the situations in which they live. The data now grow more useful and, on occasion, more fraught with professional, if not personal, peril. In some countries, no one cares if the truth is told for all to know; in others, there are those who do not like it.

When the fortunate scholar is (or has been) a resident of a country to be studied, specific situations, actual schools, and centers of educational activity may be available. Professor A has lived there, recently, and he knows where the skeletons are and what they look like. He may also know how they came to be skeletons, perhaps before their time.

Research, in this case, allows the conclusions to be reasonably well founded, and the recommendations, if any, to follow logically. On the other hand, the very residence by a scholar may give rise to biases coming from experience. One's own life has been lived, perhaps, in the system under study. It calls for a most objective and circumspect researcher to carry out a study which will remain unchallenged by others equally in the know, or by those whose skepticism is well honed.

As discerning readers may note, the adventures of scholars in

studying international and comparative education are laden with doubts. Are the sources of data valid? Do compared systems of education actually meet criteria for being compared?

Can scholars learn more from being there, as guests, visitors, or residents? Is research suspect when it comes from the efforts of a national who is no longer a national, who may even not any longer be grata as far as that particular nation is concerned?

For some scholars the research is not a comparison of several countries: their operating systems, financing procedures, curriculums, methods of instruction, achievement levels, etc. The researching may be aimed at reaching an understanding of one system element (among those cited above) in a single country.

Let's see what this element is all about; how does it work; what makes the wheels turn and the gears shift (if they do); and many more questions about education in one country.

Still, concerns about the sources of information and their validity should apply. There is sufficient reason to examine thoughtfully such sources in every instance, recognizing that in some countries having accurate data is a matter of tradition, experience, and efficiency,-- it is trustworthy and it is for the most part complete.

In other countries, information is obtained and produced with difficulty overladen with reluctance. It is just not readily obtained by responsible authorities or by anyone else; it is treated as a confidential, not-to-open-to-the-public matter of national security. In some instances, the extremes of protectionism as regards education data may be mitigated as the sense of assurance

about the data is less threatened, or the researcher is able to make it appear to be so.

In this discussion the points of contention as regards research in comparative and international education are defined by questions of validity of data, by the possible fallibility of researchers, and finally, by the nature of conclusions and ensuing recommendations.

In order to enhance the research on comparative and international education, the work of scholars is not always sufficient. Before conclusions are reached, researchers may benefit enormously from careful examination of what journalists in the field have learned. While, as part of their international reporting, they may give less emphasis to education than to political, economic, social, or personality factors, noted journalists have made significant contributions. Many have written succinctly and with great care about educational activities in national, regional, and local contexts.

For many, experiences of children and families in the very heart of the system--the school--have provided fundamentally significant insights and understanding.

In the case of some journalists with such preliminary experience, they have subsequently undertaken further study of the educational system, taking steps and making inquiries well beyond the ambience of their children's own schooling which first inspired them.

The work, effort, intensive investigation, and reporting of some journalists should be known to academic researchers and should enable them to establish mutually beneficial connections. Scholars may refer profitably to a journalistic report with relevance to their own more circumscribed examinations. They may question and

encourage reporters,(who perhaps have little enthusiasm for reading academic journals) to seek out, explore further, dig more deeply, ask certain as-yet unasked questions, cultivate new sources and in so doing extend the values of any study beyond the conditions of its unilateral origins.

For purposes of this discussion, the case of the Soviet Union and its strong magnetic influence upon researchers (and reporters) will be considered.

From the earliest days of its establishment, the times of revolution, civil war, internecine strife, and the powerful efforts to create the "new Soviet man", reporters and educators have sought to understand the Soviet Union and bring it back to the West in their own words. De Tocqueville and Steffens are but some examples.

Mrs. Philip Snowden went to Russia for six weeks in 1920 as member of a delegation of the British Labour Party and of the Trades Union Congress. The group was sent to examine conditions in Russia as part of an "independent and impartial inquiry into the industrial, economic, and political conditions of Russia.[4]

It was their task also to see "if there existed anything in the behavior of the Russian government and people so menacing to ourselves [the British] as to warrant the attacks...of foreign governments, including our own."

In her book, Mrs. Snowden, though not a journalist, but serving as one, reports on her meetings with numerous officials who expedited the visit of the committee as well as with several individuals not in the government or the party. The latter provide many anonymous comments which make an impression on her and which she reports

carefully, while protecting the individuals who entrusted her with their unfavorable thoughts.

Although her Introduction states that "we returned unanimously confirmed ...and convinced that Russian internal affairs are her own business and not ours", she also concludes that section of her book: "I am not hostile to the Russian Revolution which the tyrannous regime of the Czars made necessary and inevitable; but I am utterly opposed to the coup d'etat of the Bolsheviki, as I should be to the seizing of power by any small minority of the people; for out of this action has sprung a large part of the misery the unhappy people of Russia endure."

Mrs. Snowden provides a chapter on Education and Religion, as part of her report in Through Bolshevik Russia. She does not meet Lunacharsky, the head of the Education Commissariat in Moscow, but takes the opportunity to speak with friends of his who describe his nature:

"...he is a mind wrestling with two ideals, the one leading to the imaginative, romantic, anarchist system of a world of the past...; the other compelling him to the necessity of ...carrying out a program of general communisation in education and educational ideal. His is the habit of "Luciferism"--his own word--...the habit of challenging authority wherever it shows itself."[5]

Snowden notes that in the new Russia the theatre, music, dance, arts, and "the rest of it" come under control of the Minister of Education. "Self-expression through the body is in every way encouraged."

She reports on her visit in Petrograd with Liliana Zinovieva,

in charge of education, and the wife of the man who was one of the founders of the Third International. Zinovieva stated that in Russia now education is free and compulsory for all children up to the age of seventeen. Food, clothing, and school materials are supplied gratis. University education is open to all, and maintenance allowances are granted to workmen and others who may wish to take the University course but whose means are limited. They must show capacity and be prepared to serve the State--two perfectly reasonable conditions.

But when they drive through the city, Snowden learns that there is not universal compliance with the indicated requirements. She observes numerous school-age children playing in the streets. When she asks about the absence of enforcement of the law, she is told that the English blockade is responsible for the lack of desks, pens, pencils, even of school buildings.

When Snowden inquires about the cooperation of parents in regard to having their children in school,-- do they make any difficulty for the authorities,-- she is told they do.

"Many of them do not understand the value of education nor the wisdom of compulsion in this matter. We are slowly educating parents to keep the law..."

Snowden visits one of the "best schools in the city" and eats lunch with the children. It was much better than most meals eaten by the people of Petrograd. In this school, the children sleep in dormitories; they are happy, friendly, and affectionate with their visitors. She reports that in this school was the small son of Alexander Kerensky, interim head of state who was to be deposed and exiled by the Bolsheviks. She is pleased that the child looks well

and happy.

In all parts of the country boarding schools are being established for proletarian children, using the expropriated houses of wealthy persons, now presumably housed elsewhere. She visits such a "colony" in Samara and notes the lack of food and the frustrations of the teachers.

After hearing a young lad of twelve or thirteen demand that the "visitors go home and tell the British workmen to turn their rich people into the streets", she notes what is "my sole, real quarrel with the sincere and devoted educationists of Russia. The great outstanding purpose of their ordinary education is to teach Communism...the making of Communists [is their] goal...I feel strongly that it is a wrong to a child to bend its mind toward any special theories, Communist or other. To teach a child to read and write; to think and observe; to sift and weigh evidence; to create in it a love of beauty and a passion for truth; ...this is the whole of the law and the prophets so far as educational ideal is concerned."

Describing the conditions of education in the cities, Snowden finds much to admire and points out that in the towns it is more modest and less complete. Religious teaching is forbidden; yet churches are attended and are crowded. Recognizing that the masses of the people "must have images", the Communists have placed portraits of Marx and Lenin everywhere. Whether they realize it or not, Snowden insists that the Communists have not destroyed religion. They have simply "changed the screed". And for the Inquisition, the Extraordinary Commission supplies an adequate substitute!

Like most reporters, before and after her, Snowden considers

the future of Russia. She and the other members of the Delegation discuss their impressions. They are unanimous that they will urge discontinuance of the war and blockade against the Revolution. But, she realizes, some came out of Russia filled with uncritical enthusiasm for the Bolsheviki; others were bitterly disappointed in their expectations; others again were confirmed in their former opinions.[6]

Reporter Snowden, for her part, compares the traditions of democracy and of education in the peoples of England and America and in the nationalities of the Soviet Union, describing them as completely unlike. She abhors the tyranny of the dominant minority which has seized power, but she recommends and concludes that there must be peace between East and West; there should be no impediment to free trade; "...the peoples ...should be given liberty freely to travel from one land to another"; and so on. In her view, the only interference in Russian affairs should be the prompt supply of food, clothing, and medicines. With the past forgiven, Russia may become a great leader in the humanitarian movements of the world. 7

In the late 1920's American educationists John Dewey and George Counts went to Russia and observed the warm welcome given there to new educational ideas, admiring how the Revolution had "liberated the human powers" of the people and introduced five-year plans to direct the progress of education.

By the 1930's, though they were labeled as "Communists", both men rejected the Soviet system and opposed Communist activities in American teachers' unions. Dewey wrote his Impressions of Soviet Russia in 1929, Counts The Soviet Challenge to America in 1931. Counts pursued his interests in Soviet education with further books

in 1947, 1951, and 1957.

Dewey reports on his guided tour in Leningrad and Moscow about the development of the Revolution, now in its first decade. He speaks generally about what he sees without naming people, museums, or Palaces that have impressed him. He notes that change is taking place and he is uncertain of its full significance. What is changing, he says, is the "mental and moral disposition of the people, an educational transformation." Then he hesitates, as if taken aback by his own apparent enthusiasm,--"This impression, I fear, deviates widely from the belief of both the devotees and the enemies of the Bolshevik regime. But it is stamped in my mind and I must record it for what it is."8

Then in the chapter, "What Are The Russian Schools Doing?", Dewey remarks that a Soviet educational official pointed out how the very endeavors which were suppressed by the Tsar's regime were now "actively and officially promoted by the Bolshevist regime." Thus, he speaks of the "marvelous development of progressive educational ideas and practices under the fostering care of the Bolshevist government--and I am speaking of what I have seen and not just been told about."

Dewey describes how in the new system teachers are expected to bring about change in their students by understanding the actual conditions that influence pupils in their out-of-school life. He speaks hopefully about the processes involved in such undertakings and then reminds the reader that he has too little time to go into much detail about the methods used. He does report, however, that the "results are already of great pedagogic value, and promise to provide

a new and fruitful method of sociological research."

Dewey leaves this reader puzzled as to how such determination was made. He says that Soviet education is committed to the "project method" and then notes that he has "dwelt too long on certain general considerations at the expense of any account of what schools are actually doing and how they are doing it." Thus he insists upon his focus on the "generic" as being most significant. But "that which distinguishes the Soviet schools both from other national systems and from the progressive schools of other countries (with which they have much in common) is precisely the conscious control of every educational procedure by reference to a single and comprehensive social purpose."

In this regard, though Dewey is clearly not a journalist or even a perceptive reporter, he is surely a prophet, seeing the actual case as it was made clear to him, and as it continues to be in the present.

Dewey visited summer "colonies" (or camps) for children and he compares them favorably with similar institutions anywhere as to food, hygiene, medical attention, and daily nurture. Still elements of propaganda exist and they are obnoxious to him. He concludes the chapter on "What Are Russian Schools Doing?" with a quotation from Lenin: "We must declare openly what [bourgeois society] concealed, namely, the political function of the school...It is to construct communist society."

Referring to Commissar of Education Lunacharsky's official aims of Soviet education, Dewey notes that such propositions have to be understood in ...the practices by which they are carried into effect. He refers to his observations of students in their vitality and their

special kind of confidence in life "that afforded one of the most stimulating experiences of my life."9

The Soviets, in 1928, were taking scrupulous regard for cultural independence of the minority populations and Dewey observed that freedom from race- and color-prejudice was one of the greatest assets in Bolshevist propaganda among Asiatic peoples. He suggested that western nations might abandon their biases and thus deprive Bolshevism of its contention that capitalism, imperialistic exploitation, and race prejudice are so inseparable that relief can only come from the adoption of a communist system in the Russian style.

Generally, Dewey praises those aspects of Soviet curriculum which appeal to him and seem to replicate his own concepts about social studies, the connections between curriculum and student observations of life, and which reflects the essence of the "project method" advocated by Dewey and his associates in the United States.

He concludes by finding the Soviet schools more democratically organized than our own; in spite of internal and external difficulties, amazing progress has already been made; and he regrets that false reports now "isolate American teachers from that educational system in which our professed progressive democratic ideas are most completely embodied, and from which accordingly we might, if we would, learn much more than from the system of any other country."10

In his 1957 publication, The Challenge of Soviet Education, George S. Counts turns a more sceptical eye upon the Soviet schools. Though a frequent traveler and knowledgeable in Russian, Counts relies upon Soviet documents and upon other academic reports. His

report covers the origins of the system, the aims of Soviet education, and impacts of political, economic, moral, and general elements in the schools.

No journalist, Counts presents a well-ordered, generally anti-Soviet report, stressing the actualities of propaganda, suppression of individual rights, and the distinction between theory and practice. Much of his material comes from Soviet publications themselves and Counts analyzes and discusses it from a critical (and readable) viewpoint.

Describing the political education of the "younger generation", Counts says the youth organization, Young Pioneers, has often been called the "Boy Scouts of Russia." He punctures this by: "the comparison is as apt as likening the Supreme Soviet to the American Congress."11 He deals similarly with the reports of Soviet journals, with official documents, and with aspects of the "cult of personality" which permeated the documents and public statements of wartime and the post-war period.

Throughout, Counts takes on the Soviet establishment in its educational context. He analyzes textbooks, showing how history has been rewritten to favor the Soviets' international standing from one edition to the next. His discussion of documents for use by teachers is illuminated by his ascerbic wit and apt deprecation of their contents.

While his academic talents and credentials govern his discussions, Counts' 1957 Challenge... is an interesting sequel to his 1947 I Want to be Like Stalin. The former is a critical, careful evaluation of Soviet information about its educational system.

In the latter work, a Russian pedagogical text is extracted--we get six sections of a chapter-and Counts offers a preface, explaining the nature of the text, its intended uses, and something of its content.

More significantly, he points out that in a book aimed at preparing teachers for the Soviet elementary schools, "there is not even a suggestion of a reference ...to the harsh and tyrannical features of Soviet society. There is no reference to the severity of the dictatorship [in 1946], to the regimentation of mind, to the system of thought control, to the supervision of movement both within the country and beyond its borders, to the operations of the political police, to the treatment of dissenters, or to the use of forced labor."12

While Counts is accurate enough in his list of Soviet "horrors", one might ask if he has written the above seriously. He lets the selection from the textbook for new teachers speak for itself and offers no further comments. His conclusions about Soviet society are commonly accepted in the west, but his reports on Soviet education remain academic and limited to textual analysis.

As may be seen, individual academics have written and reported on their understandings of Soviet schools. Most frequently, such information has been gleaned from official reports, from the statements of government personnel, and from reviews of the writings of other researchers.

Among the most insightful of scholars is Brian Holmes who, writing in Western Perspectives on Soviet Education in the 1980s, at first says that, "...the conclusions reached by foreign observers have been influenced by prevailing political relationships." Further, he finds that Americans tended to see the Soviet system in

ideological terms, referring to such academic writers as Urie Bronfenbrenner, Isaac Kandel, Herbert C. Rudman, Merle Feinsod, Seymour Rosen, and others.[13]

While mentioning only briefly his own personal observations, Holmes discusses the ways in which non-Soviet scholars approached the educational system as contrasted with what seemed to be the actual intentions of Soviet educators themselves. Discrepancies often tended to rise from the initial and fundamental view and responsibilities of those reporting. Finally, he urges that careful distinctions should be made between the doctrinaire official documents and discussions and what may actually be going on within the system. Almost in despair, Holmes concedes that if reform is planned for Soviet education, it may well be the teachers there, as elsewhere, who insist upon adhering to traditional themes.

From the foregoing it should be understood that scholars who study an educational system are often handicapped by several important elements: their lack of time; their inability to insert themselves into the system at any reasonable point for any amount of time; their propensity to reach for official data and to study and compare the work of their colleagues in comparative education. The actuality of a system is often beyond them for these reasons as well as, possibly, for their continual need for interpretation of the language.

Journalists are rarely referred to in academic work in comparative education, nor is there any indication that such specialists have been invited to share their experiences and understandings.

The lone early reporter, Lincoln Steffens, journalist by profession, made almost no effort to look at the schools. Nor did he

spend time in the country from which he might draw conclusions about anything.

JOURNALISTS AS RESEARCH SOURCES

Journalist Harrison Salisbury reported on the Soviet Union during World War II and left it in 1954. Barred from returning, unable to obtain a visa, Salisbury watched from afar. But in 1969, he was able to return and resume his reporting. In his 1960 book, To Moscow and Beyond, Salisbury relies to a great extent upon Soviet sources. Nevertheless, he brings to life some of the events that are taking place: "I talked with a good many Soviet educators about the problems of the new system and found that the accent everywhere was on gradualism and special treatment for the exceptional student...14

Salisbury lived in the Soviet environment; at one time he had his own rural cottage with its vegetable garden. He was able to listen to and talk with his neighbors about the things that mattered to them. Mingling such information with the official reports, with government journals, and with "handouts", Salisbury was able to convey a more accurate picture of the situation than could most academics.

He described how the Soviet Academy of Science organized the collections of relevant data for each scientific field; there is a monthly journal for each specialty with express bulletins to report the most newsworthy developments in each field. He talked with pedagogues at all levels , determining how they felt about situations and where they thought priorities for reform should be established.

Jerrold Schecter took his family to the Soviet Union when he was assigned there in 1968 as correspondent for TIME Magazine. With him and his wife were five children who attended school for two years while in Moscow.

While Schecter's tasks were to report on the Soviet Union in all its relevant aspects, his book provides extensive information, well-written and clearly presented, about schools in Moscow.

He describes his experiences with Soviet teachers and principals, not only observing their style and behavior with regard to his own children. He is able to depict the ambience of the schools, the behaviors of school personnel, and the reactions to all of it of his wife and children. It is the latter, especially, who reflect on and narrate their impressions of their schooling from the earliest days to the times of easy and appropriate accommodation.15

In their school were enrolled numerous children from other countries. The directress (principal) felt this heterogenous population was something of a burden, since she realized that each child carried, even if unconsciously, the ideology of a competing system. And she was responsible for the "political correctness" of the school.

Schecter describes the interactions of children and teachers; the mannerisms that characterized some of the latter; the rules of discipline and the means of evading them. His children report on their actual work in the classroom: assignments, the subjects taught and how they were taught, how the teachers were strict or formal, distant or loving.

From such internal and deeply felt experiences, the Schecters are able to convey what it may be like for a Russian student in the schools. Nevertheless, they are never allowed to be anything but foreigners,--both by other students and by the teachers. So, there may indeed be a distance between the actuality for Soviet families and

the experiences of the members of this family.

In the chapter, "Schoolchildren of the Revolution", various vignettes of life in the classroom are offered. Children are required to take dictation and write, following the teacher's words, in their notebooks for later correction.

"One day in history class my teacher told us that the Russians invented the light bulb and the locomotive. She had pictures and explanations of the first light bulb and there was a picture of some tsar riding in the first locomotive.....Another time the teacher was telling us about how the Americans fought against the Russians in some war. She kept looking at me and getting more and more excited about how terrible the Americans were. She came to her senses and continued the lesson but her accusations stayed with me and I felt terrible during recess."16

One might assume that this instruction was not intended for the American child, but for the Russian children; her presence in the class was apparently fortuitous, but the teacher was not deterred.

Another Schecter child reports: "...the Russian teacher came in. I rose to stand next to my desk until everyone was quiet and he nodded to us to sit down. This didn't take long because Aleksei Leonidovich was well liked and respected; the students gave him little trouble..."

Later this teacher talked about the war in Vietnam and described his visit to Hanoi with a group of Soviet teachers.

"He was trying to explain to this generation that had not experienced war the atmosphere that fills a country when all its resources go to one use,--war. He made each of us feel guilty, not just me, the American, when he said, 'You're all bourgeois compared

with those children in North Vietnam'...We all felt subdued. No one condemned me personally as an American."

Throughout the book, the personal event joins with the official statement. One lives with the author and his family as they experience the actualities of the Soviet educational system from their own standpoint.

It is particularly poignant when a child reports on his special recollections: "Since my handwriting wasn't so good, the teacher would hold up my papers in front of the class and make fun of me. Also she made fun of me because I was left-handed and it is not common to find a left-handed person in Russia....In Russia when you are bad they take you to the corner by the ear..."[17]

The universality of teacher behavior is here clearly demonstrated. Neither "side" wins!

When Mrs. Schecter appears at a parent meeting and confronts the teacher about her frequent threats to the children and ill-considered remarks about their parents, the other parents, obliged to be silent and acquiescent seem to be delighted.

"...They looked straight at the teacher for a denial or explanation. One could sense joy in their reaction. For once someone had talked back to the teacher...You had to be careful how you phrased your displeasure..."

Thorough descriptions are offered about the zeal of parents on behalf of their children; success in education is a means for moving up in the society; even the "elitists" urge and pressure their children to do well and gain eventual access to the best the system has to offer.

Biting at their heels were the children of truck drivers and

grocery store clerks, still living in communal apartments, who had been sent to this (special) school because they worked hard and were party loyalists. These children didn't have to be pushed. Their whole attitude toward life and life's good was different.

As a journalist, Schecter writes of his own experiences and lets his wife and children report on theirs. They offer an on-site, in-depth picture of the educational system (which they compare with those of Japan--where they also attended school-- and the United States) and the view we have is refreshing. It is not one that should replace the academic analyses most scholars do and know well; it must, however, be seen as valuable complementary material.

Hedrick Smith spent four years in the Soviet Union as Moscow bureau chief for the New York Times. Assigned with his wife and children he was able to experience and describe numerous aspects of the system, but special emphasis was given in his book, The Russians, to reporting on education.

As did the Schecters, so did the Smiths,--their children were enrolled in Soviet schools. The Smiths also attended a required parent meeting at the school where two of their children attended. At this session, parents were admonished, scolded, and sharply reprimanded for the faults of their children.

"One after another she found fault with their children at school or in their home upbringing....The parents accepted her bawling out without complaint, protest, or explanation, acknowledging guilt by acquiescence and not challenging her authority. From Russian friends we heard that such criticism sessions were a regular ritual, dreaded and yet paradoxically looked forward to by both parents and children, as a source of considerable gossip afterward..."[18]

Smith notes that the "technique of public shaming for misbehavior or poor performance, brutal as it seemed to us, is central to the Soviet system, whether in bringing up children or making adults toe the line in any walk of life. From an early age, all learn the futility of arguing back with authority, of disputing public criticism, as the passivity of the parents indicated. What is more, everyone seemed to accept the idea that school is supposed to know best about bringing up children.

Smith receives and files official data on Soviet education, but he is impressed with his personal experiences and contacts:

"...I remember a toothy little Tadzhik peasant...whose family embodied the educational transformation that had taken place in three generations...Mirkhalov told us about his father,... an illiterate sharecropper before the Revolution. But, now, he said, seven of his eight children had received high school or college education and the eighth, who was eleven, would do so, too."

Later, Smith reviews one of the special schools he visited,--the children are considered gifted and their selection for the schools is already a mark of their talent.

"We knew a family who were delighted to have their daughter in an experimental school where children were allowed to argue with each other in class and occasionally allowed to lead the class in place of the teacher,--something unheard of in the normal schools...At the other extreme are poorly staffed and equipped rural schools, provincial schools which sometimes run on two or three shifts because of overcrowding, or the roughest schools in worker districts, some of which were described to me by Russian teachers as 'Soviet blackboard jungles'..."

In his meetings with teachers, through his children, or on his several trips to cities in the Soviet Union, he is told discreetly and anonymously of conditions, of plans and promises, and of their frequent lack of reality or of eventual implementation. He talks with parents in his neighborhood in Moscow and reports on what his children tell him about their school friends and teachers.

Smith is impressed with the intensive political indoctrination at all levels, the friendly but enforced conformism, even in the kindergartens. The sense of collective responsibility, disciplining, and group activities begun in kindergarten is carried forward through the school years in the classroom and in a succession of children's organizations,--the Octobrists, Young Pioneers, and Komsomol.

Referring to Bronfenbrenner's favorable discussion of such groups and their activities, Smith states that "...in real life, these systems work less ideally than in the model situations which Bronfenbrenner was shown. According to Soviet parents and children, most youngsters--especially those over ten--roundly dislike the [informers] and sometimes beat them up at recess for tattling...My own impression, moreover, is that Bronfenbrenner's prime examples ...were really disciplinary techniques manipulated by adult authorities, coaching and using children as proxies, rather than student democracy and self-initiated responsibility at work."

Throughout his work, Smith is serious and effective; he takes strong interest in Soviet edicts and plans for education and then relates them to the situations which he is able to observe and discuss.

Equally important and as high in quality is the reporting of David K. Shipler in his 1983 book, Russia: Broken Idols, Solemn

Dreams.

Despite the solemn ponderousness of the title, Shipler's lively reporting is often seriously focused upon the educational system in the Soviet Union. His beginning chapter shows his interest in the topic and he calls it, "Smothering Love: Children's Hands Tightly Held." Here he describes the condition of children in the Soviet Union, the protectiveness and love of all adults and parents for everyone's child; the special functions of grandmothers, the babushkas, whose fortunate families have a built-in nanny, baby-sitter, and sacrificing ever-present adult.

Also representing the New York Times, Shipler lived in Moscow with his wife and three children. The schools therefore became part of his life and a source for his reporting.

In the first chapter, Shipler describes a kindergarten where he is welcomed as a foreign guest. He enjoys the physical layout, the numerous teaching materials, the comforts, and the apparent ease of functioning in that school. Days later a Russian friend said he wished that Shipler had visited his daughter's school so they would have fixed it up for his benefit.

Still, Shipler reports that throughout the country "I encountered the identical physical design, a rare virtue of the centralized and authoritarian system in distributing something positive nationwide. Less attractive to a Western eye that values individual creativity is what takes place inside...the centrally dictated procedures, including uniform curricula and even holiday skits and songs that are the same from Moscow to Central Asia."19

In Soviet schools he sees classrooms in which almost nothing made by children appears on shelves or walls. There is nothing to get

fingers dirty...There is nothing experimental, no material that says to the child, "Look at me. What am I?" There are no books for younger children in a corner or on a table so they could walk over at a whim and browse.

Teachers display considerable uneasiness about artwork that is out of the well-defined groove. Fantasy is discouraged by adults when children try to practice it in drawing, storytelling, or make-believe play. Soviet schools approach academic subjects in much the same way. There are right answers and wrong answers. And very early on Soviet youngsters develop an instinct for knowing which is which.

Shipler observes youngsters drilled in a catechism of memorization and correct response. This is true for Moscow as it is for schools in most distant areas.

In his four years of visiting schools, one unusual situation was noted where high school students of English were asked to decide whether a character in a novel had acted correctly or not.

"The youngsters did not take to this easily. They giggled and squirmed, ...winking and smirking at one another across the room...At the end the teacher summed up, speaking about the need to think for oneself, for considering those about you. When the bell rang...the students leaped for the door...This was a rare teacher in any school system, especially in the Soviet Union, as the discomfort of her students testified."

Schools are places for continuing drill and memorization, and one may find adult Russians who still recite the poetry they were required to learn as children. Students are continuously graded, every day and in full view of all others. Test scores and other marks are posted on bulletin boards for all to see...Neither success nor

failure can be accomplished in privacy.

Referring to Bronfenbrenner's book, Two Worlds of Childhood, (1966), Shipler points out that for such a study of Soviet children school officials are adept enough to make sure that their most exemplary schools and pupils are used as the focus of the research. In the Soviet context this means the children who are most active in Young Pioneers and Komsomol, where collectivist ethics are practiced most intensively.

Collectivism is vital in the formal value system of the society and in the schools, leaving only some questions about its effectiveness in determining behavior. Shipler evokes contradictory evidence on this issue, pointing to both positive and negative instances in this regard. This result seems to be that informers are encouraged and praised in the schools; yet among the children themselves informers are often "taken care of" after school.

In Soviet schools teachers and parents are held accountable for their children's achievement. Shipler also recounts the scenes of parent meetings with their children's teachers, the almost humiliating public experience for some parents, the near brutal comments of the teachers about individual children and the likely family situations that cause their school problems.

Shipler comments that to live contentedly within the intricate construction of political attitude that schools build carefully for children, it is also important never to confront whatever disbelief may stir inside you lest the spell be broken.

"This, I came to feel, was one of the earliest lessons of Soviet childhood, and it helps keep many, perhaps most adults in a spirit of political comfort with their country and their system. To disbelieve

is to destroy."

Shipler's work is replete with specific cases that allow him to generalize about education in the Soviet Union. From such examples, he is able to compare the stated objectives, the contents of textbooks and teachers' manuals, the detailed planning statements for education, with the actualities of life in the schools.[19]

For purposes of this report, his lines are most apt: "Yet the basic three R's are the main stuff of the classroom, supplemented by what might be called the three P's--politics, party, and patriotism...making an ample contribution to the stout convictions by which Russians view themselves and the world."

In a final case of working journalists in the Soviet Union and their reports on education, David K. Willis' book, Klass: How Russians Really Live, focuses most explicitly on those elements which reflect privilege rather than universal conditions. Willis spent four and one-half years as Moscow bureau chief for the Christian Science Monitor and decided to deal with those aspects of Soviet life which are reserved for the "elite" of the country rather than what is experienced by the ordinary citizen.[20]

His chapter on education is, "The Children of the Privileged", describing the life of those with connections to the highest echelons of the Soviet state. Poor students are given exceptional tutoring and special opportunities to take and re-take examinations. Parents of this class, military, scientists, Party and government officials, and managers, see to it that their children are admitted to superior institutes and universities. Their pampered youth are not subject to the military draft and, following graduation (or departure) from school, they may obtain posts that offer overseas opportunities or

such prestigious jobs as "analysis" or "research" in some state enterprise.

Willis notes that the average "Urban and Rural Class child plods along in his nearest neighborhood school, scoring 'threes' or less on the Soviet national grading scale of one to five for tests...he may leave school after eight years rather than the standard ten years and work in a factory or on a farm; he is unlikely to possess the influence to avoid national military service...He emerges from high school with basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills, with large doses of Party propaganda, and with a deep ignorance of the outside world."

Tutors earn much money by helping students to prepare for the admission examinations to prestigious universities in Moscow and Leningrad. In addition, members of the "Rising class" urgently seek language study, recognizing that the most desirable jobs are those outside the Soviet Union. A Russian friend tells Willis that for each opening in the English Department of Leningrad State University there were twenty-two clamoring applicants. Willis saw 400 high school graduates competing for forty first-year places in the Moscow University law faculty.

At both state universities influence is used all the time, especially in the "humanities" or "liberal arts" programs. In Republic capitals or large cities it is common for ambitious blue-collar workers to trade favors to ensure their children's entry into local higher education. Party officials can simply order a pupil into a university, or keep him out if they consider him unreliable. Willis was told that the "Party permits only a certain quota of Jewish undergraduates at any given time."

Willis describes the special schools, for languages, mathematics, the sciences, art,music and ballet. For admission to such schools, talent is vital but connections can provide introductions and advantages. Schools for theatre and the circus also attract students and families eager to obtain special opportunities with options to travel abroad.

CONCLUSION

This discussion has been undertaken with the intention of showing how links may be established profitably between academic researchers in comparative education and colleagues in the profession of journalism. Examples have been presented of the kinds of data generally used by scholars with concomitant discussions and analyses.

Cases have also been shown of how leading journalists, in earlier years and currently, are able to reach into the system under study,(in this case the Soviet Union) and add richness and value to the data otherwise found. Contacts with officialdom and with private citizens have yielded worthwhile knowledge so necessary to reaching into the "riddle wrapped inside an enigma".

While the concept is obviously true for so difficult and unyielding a country, in terms of foreign "intrusions" into the system, as the Soviet Union, it has shown itself to be vastly worthwhile in more open societies. Self-critical studies in the United States (and elsewhere) have proven immensely important both to scholars and laymen in the ensuing development of study, planning, and reform.

Finally, we recognize that in the field of comparative education there are what might be called "Categories of

Credibility", ranging upward from:

a. official delegates and representatives and their documents;

b. tourists in groups, under official guidance and with official "service";

c. individual tourists and "honored guests"; recognizing that in some situations there are no "individual tourists";

d. journalists with specific accreditation to a Western newspaper or magazine.

It is not necessary to claim that the scholarly journals and volumes in comparative education have greater "value" than the reports of intensive journalism. In point of fact, it would be well that academic students did reach toward the explicit findings of reporters stationed for more than just a few months in a country. Such acceptance of seasoned testimony can serve to enrich and clarify the kinds of data frequently presented by academics.

This is so considering who are the ultimate consumers of scholarly research: not only other scholars, not only international decision-makers who are concerned as regards development and technical assistance, but the students in the universities where we teach, the teachers in the schools that surround us, the curriculums which use as their foundations the reports of scholars--and journalists--, the journals, newspapers, and major media, and interested laymen in various professional endeavors.

Journalists who are assigned to "cover" a national capital, (Moscow for example) become closely and accurately informed about such matters as education. They observe and listen, comparing notes over time, and have an enhanced opportunity to analyze, re-think and re-write their conclusions.

They should be encouraged and welcomed by educational researchers for their ability to complement and enlighten those who may have the skills of investigation but not always the time or the opportunity to examine their subjects as fully as do journalists. Such reporters should, therefore, be encouraged to see educational comparativists as their colleagues, as researchers should consider journalists who write honestly and fairly to be theirs.

FOOTNOTES

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